

A Marxist Perspective: “The Doll’s House,” “The Garden Party” and “A Cup of Tea”

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Abstract: The short stories “The Doll’s House,” “The Garden Party” and “A Cup of Tea” are written by Katherine Mansfield in the year 1922. This paper analyses these three short stories from a Marxist perspective by applying the theory of ideology as proposed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The study takes a look into the oppression faced by the members of the lowerclass and the belief system of the upper-class. The Marxist approach questions the economic conditions and power and shows a battle between dominant and oppressed sections of society. The ideology that comes under Marxist theory shows the real economic conditions in any society and is the first key concept in Marxist theory. The short story “The Doll’s House” shows how the school-going children are involved in reinforcing their power over the oppressed and marginalized classes. In “The Garden Party” insensitivity is seen towards the lower-class members while in “A Cup of Tea” we see how Rosemary does things only to show that rich people aren’t heartless. Through all three stories we see how the system naturalizes and legitimizes unequal power distribution. The readers must acknowledge the fact that the members of lower classes face several difficulties and things still need to change.

Keywords: Marxism, ideology, oppression, lower-class, higher-class, belief systems, class-division.

1. INTRODUCTION

Hypothesis

“Examining Katherine Mansfield’s “The Doll’s House,” “The Garden Party” and “A Cup of Tea” from Marxist perspective by using Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ theory of ideology to understand the oppression, belief systems, and ideas of classes.”

Scope of the Study

This study does not compare other short stories written by this author. The study also doesn’t take into account any other perspective or oppression. It also doesn’t consider any other theory under the Marxist perspective except the theory of ideology. The focus of this study is to compare these three short stories under the theory of ideology from a Marxist perspective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

“The Literary Text Type: Notes on A Method of Analysis Based on Text Linguistics and A Practical Application to Katherine Mansfield’s <<The Garden Party>>” is written by Pilar Alonso. He analysis the short story “The Garden Party” by being critical of the words used by the author, Katherine Mansfield.

Paul Delany wrote his paper “Short and Simple Annals of the Poor: Katherine Mansfield’s “The Doll’s House”” where he describes the two little Kelveys, their life and other’s behaviour towards them.

“Narrative Techniques and Characterisation in Katherine Mansfield ‘A Cup of Tea’” is written by Sunil Dattatraya. The purpose of this paper is to study the famous and much-anthologized story “A Cup of Tea” so as to bring out the brilliant use of narrative techniques to delineate the protagonist’s character.

Adam Sorkin writes about Katherine Mansfield’s short story “The Garden Party” where he talks about the realistic treatment of social and economic actuality which is the basic concept as it is an essential constituent of its structure in his paper “Katherine Mansfield’s ‘The Garden Party’: Style And Social Occasion.”

“Katherine Mansfield and the Working Classes” is written by Charles Ferrall. In this paper, he analyses various short stories of Katherine Mansfield including her “The Garden Party” and shows the real-life conditions of the working-class people.

Genilda Azeredo wrote “Affective (mis)encounters in ‘The Doll’s House’” which aims at tracing the relations among the characters, focusing on their affective actions—both those linked to negative affects and those related to positive affects.

“A Stylistic Analysis of Katherine Mansfield’s Short Story A Cup of Tea” is written by Assil Ghariri. He uses linguistic theory to describe and explain how and why a text works as it does and how we come from the words on the page to its meaning and uses transitivity theory to analyse this short story.

Ratna Asmarani in her paper analyses the psychological character of the upper class woman in Katherine Mansfield’s short story entitled A Cup of Tea in her paper “The Psychological Character of Rosemary Fell in Katherine Mansfield’s Short Story Entitled ‘A Cup of Tea’.”

Pramod Nayar’s “*Contemporary Literature and Cultural Theory*” includes some of the major theories to study various literary works including Marxism and also consist of various theories under Marxism.

This study is unique as it tries to look at the short stories “The Doll’s House,” “The Garden Party” and “A Cup of Tea” written by Katherine Mansfield using the theory of ideology under Marxist perspective. The study explores how the author shows the oppression faced by the lower-class members and how the higher-class members naturalize these oppressions. This study also shows how ruling ideas are imposed on lower class and class division in these stories.

Theoretical Framework

Marxist theory was written in the 19th century by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels which locates all forms of culture that is music, painting, and literature within a social context. It will locate all forms of art within existing social conditions of economics and politics. Marxist thinking has been influential in cultural theory, anthropology, history, and literary criticism. It is one of the most political forms of cultural theory because (1) it links art with actual conditions within a particular culture and (2) it sees forms of art not as some special realm but intimately linked to the existing power relations within a particular culture (Nayar 148). Marxist criticism, therefore, explores power relations embedded and concealed in the cultural text.

According to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ideology is the twist of reality that is the real economic conditions in any society and is the first key concept in Marxist theory. Ideology is the writings, speeches, beliefs and opinions which are cultural practices that assert the naturalness and necessity of economic practices. It requires a commonly accepted cultural form. It is an instrument of power because it helps prop up the dominant classes by naturalizing an exploitative relationship and convincing the working classes that this is how things are. It also prevents the recognition of operation by the oppressed (Nayar 158). It is about power because it legitimizes is the power of the dominant classes or sections of society and provides a system of beliefs and ideas that the working classes absorb.

Analysis

“If money is the bond binding me to human life, binding society to me, connecting me with nature and man, is not money the bond of all bonds? Can it not dissolve and bind all ties? Is it not, therefore, also the universal agent of separation?”

— Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Goodreads) Katherine Mansfield is the pen name of Kathleen Mansfield Murry under which she used to write. She wrote short stories, poetry, letters, journals, and reviews, and is regarded as a central figure in British modernism. She dealt with topics like the difficulties and ambivalences of families and sexuality, the fragility and vulnerability of relationships, the complexities and insensitivities of the rising middle classes, the social consequences of war, and overwhelmingly the attempt to extract whatever beauty and vitality one can from mundane and increasingly difficult experience. This research paper includes her three short stories, they are; “The Doll’s

House”, “The Garden Party” and “A Cup of Tea” all published in the year 1922 which shows the class division among the society and the treatment of the lower class people. In these stories, she tries to depict the reality of the British society of 20th century and their materialistic or capitalistic behaviour due to certain ideology that is the belief system they hold. Also, it was found that British society was much stern about their ideologies towards class and therefore, Katherine tries to show this harsher reality in her short stories.

The British are uniquely obsessed with ‘class’ (Lawrence 1). In, “The Doll’s House”, the Burnells being the member of higher class society didn’t include the Kelveys who belong to a lower class society therefore, we can see that a line was drawn among the classes and they had to stay out of the ring only because there was a difference in economic status while in “The Garden Party” the dead man’s family wasn’t invited to the party before and the family did not expect sympathy as the earning family member was dead from Sheridans who belong to a higher class. Also, the short story “A Cup of Tea” pictures the differential behaviour of the upper class towards the lower class through the character of Rosemary which indirectly shows the ideology of a class-divided society. Ideology is portrayed as a feature of all class-divided societies. Also, during this period British colonialism thrived and created class-division (Course Hero). Karl Marx and Fredrich Engles argued that the capitalist mode of production justified and naturalised itself through certain patterns of thoughts and ideas. With social structures such as education, culture, and religion the oppressed classes believed that the order of inequality in society is natural or preordained, and do not recognise that they are oppressed. This system of thought or representation that helps naturalise economic inequality and oppression is termed ideology (Nayar 158). This can be seen through Kelveys who always followed whatever was said by the children of the higher class society, for instance, these children had formed an ideology of not talking to Kelveys and this was not only followed by Burnells, Cole, Logan, or other children from higher class but also by the children of the store keeper and of the milkman and also they were been teased by these children. Also, the teachers considered the Kelveys inferior and didn’t pay heed to them. Through this, Katherine tells us the situation and ideology of the British society which was not only ingrained among the adults but also among the children who learn from their parents to bully the members belonging to the lower class. Similarly, Laura said that she will remember the misery of the dead man’s family after the party, after listening to her mother, Mrs. Sheridan. Also, Rosemary forces the poor girl, Miss Smith to come to her house to only show that “rich people had hearts, and that women were sisters.” For Marx, ideological beliefs such as these are social in that they are widely shared, indeed so widely-shared that for long periods they constitute the ‘ruling’ or ‘dominant’ ideas in a given class-divided society (Wolff).

Further, there are two theories of Ideology as proposed by Karl Marx. The first is the ruling ideas which are imposed on the lower class as seen before and the second is that each class has its own ideology, for instance, the Burnells considers other children of similar or higher class to make them see the doll’s house and through Lena, the author made us see how the society idealise that a washerwoman’s children are going to be servants too when she says “Is it true you’re going to be a servant when you grow up, Lil Kelvey?” While Rosemary being rich buys all the expensive things that cost a fortune without thinking about money and has the thinking that hungry people such as Miss Smith are easily lead. Through this, we see that the higher class has an ideology of being superior and exquisite from other classes. Even in “The Garden Party” we see that the Sheridans representing the higher class society, spend too much on a party. Also, the higher class children teased and bullied the Kelveys, didn’t included them for showing them the doll’s house, made fun of them just because they are poor and Mrs. Burnell shooed them as they were seeing the doll house because it was to be seen only by the higher class children and not them and also, she had denied Kezia and asked her to follow the same, Sheridans justified their party by saying that the poor family does not expect sympathy from us while Rosemary justified her behaviour by making the point that all rich aren’t heartless. Therefore, through this, we can say that ideology provides justification for any action (Nayar 161).

Additionally, in these three short stories, we see that higher class and lower class members have a difference in representing themselves. For instance, in “The Doll’s House,” Kelveys wear clothes given by others that are torn and stitched with different materials provided by the people where their mother worked and the food they ate was basic, like jam sandwiches while others ate mutton sandwiches and their teachers weren’t impressed when Kelveys came up with common-looking flowers to her desk. While the Sheridans gave a lavish party with expensive flowers but to the dead’s man family they sent leftovers and arum lilies too by saying that “People of that class are so impressed by arum lilies.” However, Rosemary buys all the expensive stuff and when the poor girl asks for tea, she offers her, the brandy as she thinks that it will be a privilege for her to drink it. Through this, it is conveyed that people are materialistic and in this sense, ideology is material because it is embedded in and works through a material institutions such as the family or the schooling system. Ideology constructs the individual as a subject because it makes the individual accept reality, understand it, and live within it. Ideology is the

context in which we lead our lives, and is hence a material reality. Also, ideology is conveyed through particular forms of representation (Nayar 163).

Furthermore, Kelveys, the dead man's family, and the poor girl that is Miss Smith all represent the oppressed class who do not have basic amenities while the higher class people have a more luxurious life and therefore, they can buy exquisite things. Due to this, the higher class members become dominant as they have more resources and through this, they can rule over those with fewer resources and gain power over them which is accepted by the lower class. Therefore, it proves what Marx and Engels say about the ideology that enables the dominant classes to reinforce their power over the oppressed and marginalised classes because ideology serves as a system of beliefs that naturalises the unequal power relation, and lead you are pressed to accept it as natural, given and a self-evident and therefore beyond questioning. Also, ideology is about power because it legitimises the power of the dominant classes or the section of a society and naturalises conditions of exploitation (Nayar 160).

Lastly, much of the communication in "The Doll's House" is nonverbal. The Kelvey sisters, in particular, barely speak in the story, instead of communicating mostly through gestures and glances. It's clear, however, that though Lil and Else rarely talk, they easily understand each other. In contrast, the Burnells and their friends are almost constantly yapping, gossiping, or boasting about the doll's house. Unlike the Kelveys, their chatter often proves shallow and frivolous. In "A Cup of Tea" the reality of Rosemary's intention is full of hypocrisy. She helps her not out of kindness or cares rather for her own interests. She thought by helping so would give her a chance of upgrading her status and boasting her action. In a similar manner, Mansfield pinpoints her society in which upper classes were taking advantage of virtuous acts for their own benefits. Also, in "The Garden Party" social elites become so focused on the surface appearance of things that they seem to lose a normal range of human emotion; they position themselves as viewers of, rather than participants in, the world. This explains how ideology works as it is dependent upon language and science because it has to present reality in particular ways by obscuring other, harsher aspects of this reality (Nayar 161-2). It is also can wade through particular forms of re-presentation as shown by Katherine Mansfield in all three short stories.

3. CONCLUSION

Thus, the study explores the short stories "The Doll's House," "The Garden Party" and "A Cup of Tea" from the theory of ideology as proposed by Karl Marx and Fredrich Engels under Marxist perspective. The subject matter of these three short stories does correlate with the theory of ideology. Therefore, we can say that this study has explored the capital list classes that have naturalized the condition of exploitation and imposes a system of beliefs and ideas that the working classes should have. It also shows that ideology provides the justification for any action and is a material reality.

Relevance of Research

This study will help the readers to know about the conditions of the members of lowerclass society. It tells about how class division works in society and how people of certain classes have certain belief systems or ideas regarding their class. Also, it shows the necessity of destroying the class believes and accepting each other even when people belong to different classes. When there is a sense of pride in one's class, there arises discrimination due to particular ideology and therefore, there is a need to change the society which has become materialistic since the industrial revolution and this will help each one to become a better individual.

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